Topic: Terrorism

Deemed “one of the most serious threats to international peace and security”[[1]](#endnote-1) by the United Nations, terrorism threatens the safety of innocent people all around the world. An act of terrorism is violence carried out by a **non-state[[2]](#footnote-1)** actor with political, ideological or religious motivations. [[3]](#endnote-2) Terrorism can happen anywhere in the world. It is a very difficult concept to define because of the political and emotional discrimination and because different groups and governments can have very different ideas about what actions can be considered terrorism as well as who is and who is not a terrorist.

definitiON of terrorism

The term “terrorism” is so conversional that it doesn’t have an agreed-upon definition among countries, or even the United Nations. However, most governments, scholars and the UN agree that the objective of terrorist organizations is to achieve “social reform and political change”[[4]](#endnote-3) by creating fear within the public. Terrorists may have political (e.g. the Irish Republican Army), ideological (e.g. Animal Liberation Front, Earth Liberation Front) and/or religious (e.g. al-Qaeda, Hezbollah) motivations. They could also be seeking revenge and retaliation on the government. [[5]](#endnote-4)



Almost 200 people were killed in the Madrid train bombings in 2004.ii

The United Nations, in its resolution 65/34 *Measures to eliminate international terrorism* (2011), “reiterates that criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.”[[6]](#endnote-5) The United Nations has zero tolerance for non-state actors and has sought ways to stop nations from giving security, money or weapons to terrorist organizations. The goal of an organization often determines its status as a terrorist group, however that is difficult to identify without analyzing a specific attack and the methods used to accomplish that goal.

methods of operation

Terrorists try to achieve their goals by extreme means ranging from threats to actual bombings and assassinations, to intimidate, coerce, and create fear among the public. Because most terrorist groups have a relatively small number of members, limited weapons, and comparatively few organizational resources, they rely on dramatic and devastating acts of violence to attract attention to their cause. [[7]](#endnote-6) The instant publicity from these attacks gives them the power and influence that they otherwise lack. [[8]](#endnote-7)

Some of the tactics that terrorist use include, but are not limited to: airline hijackings, suicide bombings, car bombs, building explosions, assassinations and kidnappings, mailings of explosive, chemical or biological and **agro-terrorism**[[9]](#footnote-2). [[10]](#endnote-8) Terrorists may also be able to wreck havoc on a population through computer-based attacks such as viruses or hacking into sensitive information. Terrorists also may use chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weapons or even **weapons of mass destruction** (WMD)[[11]](#footnote-3), [[12]](#endnote-9) although some experts argue that this method is unconventional and unlikely because of their limited resources. [[13]](#endnote-10)

Terrorists choose their targets very strategically, because their goal is to intimidate a large group of people, such as an ethnic or religious enemy, an entire country, or the international community. [[14]](#endnote-11) The psychological effects of terrorism have an important impact on many more people than just the immediate victims of an attack. [[15]](#endnote-12) The most common targets of terrorists are busy, public places that would attract a lot of attention and cause massive causalities, such as urban transportation centers, international airports, religious institutions, financial centers (like banks), government buildings or high-profile landmarks.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

Terrorism has a direct and serious impact on human rights, for both its victims and perpetrators, in both acts of terrorism and counterterrorism. Firstly, acts of terrorism on innocent people pose a threat to the fundamental freedoms that all individuals and groups should be able to enjoy, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. [[16]](#endnote-13) Terrorism also fuels racist sentiments among groups of victims against those who are of the same ethnicity, nationality or religion as the terrorists. This type of discrimination contributes to hate crimes against different groups of people.

Moreover, to combating international terrorism governments have imposed laws that limit the freedoms of certain groups and the rights of people. Non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International[[17]](#endnote-14) have condemned such governments for eroding the freedoms of their people. A major debate is how to protect citizens and maintain the rights and privacy of individuals. An example of this debate is the ongoing controversy in the United States over the passage of the Patriot Act in October 2001.

Human rights abuses and torture have also been reported in Guantánamo Bay detention camp, located within the U.S. Naval Base in Cuba, where suspected terrorists from the war in Afghanistan and Iraq are held. The camp, which opened in 2002, has been highly controversial not only in its treatment of detainees, but also in its detention of individuals without charging them with a crime. Efforts have been made by the Obama Administration to close Guantanamo Bay and release the prisoners or charge them with a crime and put them on trial.

Currently, there are 171 detainees at “Gitmo” and 80 of them have been identified for release. Others will be sent to trial, while the remaining 48 detainees are going to be held indefinitely because there is not enough evidence to try them and the United States believes they are too dangerous to be released. There have been talks about transferring these detainees as part of a broader negotiation strategy, but U.S. officials are still weighing their options.

1. Annan, Kofi. “Uniting against Terrorism: Recommendations for a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy” 27 April 2006. <<http://www.un.org/unitingagainstterrorism/>> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. **Non-State:** Organizations involved in global issues that are not countries [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Photo Credit: *The Guardian* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. Gorman, Fitzalan C. “Non-State Actors, Terrorism and the United Nations.” Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. 13 April 2009. PDF. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Englehart, Neil and Charles Kurzman. “Welcome to World Peace.” *Social Forces*. 4 June 2006. PDF. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. United Nations General Assembly. A/RES/65/34: Measures to eliminate international terrorism. 10 January 2011. <<http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/34>> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. Hoffman, Bruce. "Terrorism." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2009* [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft, 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. “Terrorism” American Red Cross. March 2007. <<http://www.redcross.org/images/pdfs/code/terrorism.pdf>> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. **Agro-terrorism**: terrorist attack on farming or food supply using plant or animal bacteria and virus [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
10. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
11. **Weapons of mass destruction**: a weapon that causes harm to a large number of people, the environment, or man-made structures [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
12. Bowman, Steve. “Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Terrorist Threat.” CRS Report for Congress. 7 March 2002. PDF. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
13. Parachini, John. “Putting WMD Terrorism into Perspective.” *The Washington Quarterly*. Autumn 2003. Volume 24, Number 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
14. Hoffman, Bruce. "Terrorism." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2009* [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft, 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
15. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
16. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. “Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism.” July 2008. [<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf](file:///\\common\Documents\Shared%20UNAGB%20DOCS\Global%20Classrooms\Interns\Summer%202011\Miriam\%3chttp:\www.ohchr.org\Documents\Publications\Factsheet32EN.pdf)> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
17. “Security and Human Rights: counter-terrorism and the United Nations.” Amnesty International. September 2008. PDF. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)